

VA Medical Center, Aspinwall Division  
Infirmary Building (Building No. 1)  
5103 Delafield Avenue  
Aspinwall Vicinity  
Allegheny County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5438-A

HABS  
PA  
1-ASPWAY  
1-A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HABS  
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# HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

VA MEDICAL CENTER,  
ASPINWALL DIVISION, INFIRMARY  
(Building No. 1)

HABS No. PA-5438-A

**Location:** The Infirmary Building is located in the southwest quadrant of the hospital site, at the end of the main entry drive, approximately 720 feet from Delafield Avenue. The Medical Center is located at 5103 Delafield Avenue, Aspinwall vicinity, O'Hara Township, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania.

USGS Pittsburgh East Quadrangle. Universal Transverse Mercator  
Coordinates: 17.594100.4483140

**Present Owner:** United States Veterans Administration

**Present Occupant:** United States Veterans Administration

**Present Use:** Veterans Hospital

**Significance:** The Infirmary Building is one of the original structures erected by the United States Veterans' Bureau at Aspinwall in 1924. It is significant for its associations with the Veterans' Bureau's national effort, during the 1920s, to expand its medical facilities and is representative of the earliest period of construction at the Aspinwall site. The oldest portions of the building correspond closely to the standardized plans for infirmaries included within the Veterans' Bureau's "architectural set," with modifications intended to accommodate the building's use as a tuberculosis facility. Used at veterans' facilities throughout the nation, the "set" dictates the general layout of the hospital site, the orientation of the buildings on the site, and the basic floor plan of the principal buildings. Later additions in 1932 and 1936 reflect the facility's evolution into a general care and surgical hospital.

Part I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Dates of erection: 1924, addition 1932, addition 1938.
2. Architect/Engineer: United States Veterans' Bureau, 1924; United States Veterans Administration, 1932; Public Works Administration, 1938.
3. Original and Subsequent Owners: United States Veterans Administration.
4. Builders, contractors, suppliers: Unknown.
5. Original plans and construction: United States Veterans' Bureau, 1924; United States Veterans Administration, 1932 and 1938.
6. Alterations and additions: The Infirmary has undergone a number of alterations and expansions since its construction in 1924. In 1932 a "T"-shaped four-story addition was added to the north end of the original structure. Besides increasing bed capacity the extension repositioned the principal entrance onto the newly created north facade. A four-story addition was added to the original structure at the location of the former main entrance on the east facade in 1938.

Subsequent alterations have included the removal of the wood balustrade from the main entrance portico, the renovation of the ambulance entrance, the building of a new rear entrance on the south facade, the rebuilding of the parapets on the southern most wings, the inclusion of a wheelchair ramp on the south facade, the replacement of the original six over six wood double-hung sash with aluminum sash and the replacement of the slate roofing shingle with asbestos. Interior changes have occurred almost continuously to adjust to changes in medical practice and care, these changes apply mainly to use.

- B. Historical Context: The Infirmary Building is the principal building at the Aspinwall VA Medical Center. The oldest, southern, portions of the building date to 1924 and are associated with the initial development of the Aspinwall site by the Veterans' Bureau. The building conforms to the dictates of the "architectural set" developed by the Veterans' Bureau in the early 1920s with slight modifications made due to the specific site and hospital function. The hospital functioned as a tubercular facility until 1936 at which time it was converted for use as a general medical and surgical facility.

The building underwent major expansion programs in 1932 and 1938. The 1932 addition was "T"-shaped in plan and extended from the north side of the 1924 building. The 1938 addition was joined to the main building at the 1924 principal entrance and ran perpendicular to the main building. Each of these additions remain similar to the architectural palette of the original buildings at the site.

The Infirmary has remained in use as an hospital since its inception in 1924. Throughout this time it has adjusted to the changing philosophies and specializations dictated by the V.A., local administrators and staff. Currently the building is occupied with the exception of the vacant second-floor of the old east wing.

## Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Georgian Revival.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The Infirmary Building consists of a central mass with parallel side wings extending at right angles to the main block. The main block measures approximately 404 feet by 40 feet and is four stories high, with a fifth floor penthouse located atop the southernmost third of the block. The northernmost wings, each four stories tall, measure approximately 49 feet by 48 feet and, in conjunction with the north end of the main block, all of which were erected in 1932, constitute the principal facade, which measures 138 feet across. The second set of wings, dating from 1924, are located at approximately the mid-point of the main block and are two stories in height. The eastern wing measures approximately 53 feet by 44 feet while the western wing measures approximately 53 feet by 52 feet. The next wing to the south, built in 1938, is four stories tall. It is located on the east side of the main block and measures approximately 44 feet by 229 feet. The southernmost wings, which date from 1924, are each two stories tall and measure approximately 212 feet by 30 feet. In conjunction with the south facade of the main block these wings form the rear facade.
2. Foundations: Reinforced concrete.

3. Walls: Structural tile with exterior brick veneer. The 1924 building has a slightly beveled water table, while the 1932 section displays a concrete water table. A concrete belt course is evident on the newer sections of the building.
4. Structural systems, framing: One-way concrete slab construction including columns, beams and floors.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: The north, or front, facade contains a raised two-story porch with square wood columns, grouped at the corners, supporting a wood entablature and flat roof. The entablature includes a plain architrave, medallions positioned above the column heads and dentils. The porch measures approximately 36 feet by 13 feet and includes slate pavement decking, an iron railing and granite steps.

The southernmost wings contain partially open loggias incorporated into the main block of each wing. The loggias are located on both floors at the ends of the wings, as well as at the third floor of the main hospital block on the south facade. Square concrete columns appear in antis within the openings of the loggias. Metal stairs cut through the concrete flooring and connect the upper and lower loggias.

A concrete stoop with wrought iron hand rails is positioned on the east side of the 1938 east wing. The south, or rear, facade includes an open front, single story brick enclosure at the entry. The west facade of the main block contains a small raised concrete loading dock and ambulance entry covered with a flat built-up roof.

6. Chimneys: A narrow brick chimney extends the full height of the east facade just south of the penthouse.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The principal entrance on the north facade contains a pair of automatic aluminum and glass doors with a leaded glass transom above. The doors are surrounded by a thin, applied wood frame, the upper part of which contains a plain architrave capped by a scrolled broken pediment with urn. The east side of the 1938 east wing contains a metal replacement door surrounded by cast stone pilasters supporting a cast stone architrave, arched broken pediment and urn. Other doorways are fitted with modern aluminum and glass doors.

- b. Windows and shutters: All windows are rectangular, with brick lintels and stone sills. Sash are two-light sliding aluminum replacement units with a fixed light above. The penthouse contains two decorative cast stone window frames with pediments and pilasters.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Flat built-up roofs occur over the 1924 and 1938 wings. The 1924 elements of the main block incorporate a long hipped roof broken by a hipped roof penthouse. The front, north, facade has a separate hipped roof over the 1932 north wings and main block.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The main block has a simple wood block cornice.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Narrow gabled dormers with louvered panels instead of window sash appear on both sides of the main block. The northern facade contains dormers with two-light aluminum sash similar to those in the rest of the building.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor Plans: Most floors have double-loaded corridors flanked by rooms of varying size. Room sizes are determined by the type of medical unit located on the specific floor or wing. The southernmost wings have single-loaded corridors.
- 2. Stairways: Concrete and metal stairs with wrought iron balusters and wooden handrails.
- 3. Flooring: Linoleum flooring with terrazzo base and baseboard. The 1938 east wing has concrete baseboards.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finishes: Painted plaster over structural tile walls with dropped acoustical tile ceilings. Some corridors incorporate paneled wainscoting as a later alteration.
- 5. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Wood doors in metal frames.
  - b. Windows: Smooth plaster window surrounds.

6. Decorative features and trim: No significant decorative features exist other than those addressed previously.
7. Hardware: Brass, aluminum and steel.
8. Mechanical equipment: Mechanical equipment has been updated throughout the years and is consistent with current practice.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The Infirmary Building occupies the highest point within the hospital grounds and is located at the end of a formal main entry drive with a circular turn-around directly in front of the building's north, main, entry. The main block is oriented along a north-south axis with wings extending to the east and west.
2. Historic landscape design: The Infirmary Building is placed within the 1924 landscape design, which created a campus-like setting of buildings, lawns, and tree-lined walks and roads. Part of the original landscaping scheme has been lost due to the construction of later additions. Nevertheless, the Infirmary Building reflects the importance of the Veteran's Bureau's initial landscape design, incorporating lawns, trees, and shrubbery into the overall hospital design.
3. Outbuildings: Enclosed walkway connects to the Dining Hall (Building 17) and Recreation Building (Building No. 7) from the west facade in the vicinity of the loading dock.

Part III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original Architectural Drawings: Located at Engineering Services, VA Medical Center, Oakland Division, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
- B. Early Views: Located at Engineering Services, VA Medical Center, Oakland Division, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
- C. Interviews: Personnel, United States Veterans Administration Medical Center, Aspinwall Division, O'Hara Township, Pennsylvania.
- D. Bibliography:
  - I. Primary and unpublished sources:

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2. Secondary and published sources:

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#### Part IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This documentation was undertaken in July 1989 in accordance with a Memorandum of Agreement between the United States Veterans Administration, the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as a mitigative measure prior to the demolition of the subject buildings at the Aspinwall Division Medical Center.

Glenn Ceponis/Patrick O'Bannon  
Assistant Historian/Principal Historian  
John Milner Associates, Inc.  
1216 Arch Street, 5th Floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19107

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